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FM AMEMBASSY BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3824
INFO RUEHXS/ASEAN COLLECTIVE
RUEHXS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS

UNCLAS BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN 000156

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SENSITIVE

DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/MTS, EAP/RSP, EAP/PD, AND OES
E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [SENV PREL BX](#)
SUBJECT: BRUNEI MOVING FORWARD ON HEART OF BORNEO

REF: KUALA LUMPUR 380

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) The Government of Brunei is pushing forward with projects under the Heart of Borneo (HoB) initiative that it hopes will establish Brunei as a leader of this rainforest protection project. This month Brunei will receive the first-ever ASEAN peer review of its forest management practices and next month Brunei will host a key technical meeting of the HoB partners at which Brunei will lay out implementation objectives and advance itself as the site for the HoB secretariat. The GoB welcomes USG support, including our proposed tri-lateral IV project (co-developed by AmEmbassies Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta). END SUMMARY.

HoB Boundaries Set

2. (SBU) The GoB has engaged WWF's HoB driving force Dato Mikaaail Kavanagh to help finalize its Strategic Framework. The plan currently includes 58 percent of Brunei's total territory under the HoB framework. Deputy Minister of Industry and Primary Resources Dato Hamdillah Abdul Wahab told us recently that Brunei intentionally maximized HoB territory along its border with Malaysia in order to leverage the HoB process to get Malaysia to take stronger action against illegal loggers who routinely cross the border into Brunei for high value trees like sandal wood.

Forestry Plan to Get ASEAN Peer Review

3. (SBU) The GoB has invited representatives from Cambodia and the Philippines to participate in Brunei's discussion of its new National Forestry Plan. Scheduled for June 20-21, this review will be the first conducted under a new ASEAN peer review process. Dato Hamdillah told us that he hopes that by opening itself first to peer review, the GoB will encourage greater transparency by Indonesia (and Malaysia) on forest management policy and practice. The Director of the Forestry Department, Saidin Salleh, told us May 23 that one of Brunei's greatest challenges is that the Forestry Department has only partial jurisdiction over Brunei's forest reserves. The Ministry of Defense also has the authority to use any part of Brunei's territory. The ASEAN peer review will help push Brunei to coordinate internally forest use and management among all interested agencies.

HoB Agenda and Next Steps

¶4. (SBU) Brunei will host the next trilateral coordination meeting July 18-19 to prepare a report on HoB status and next steps to the BIMP-EAGA Secretariat. Saidin Salleh said Brunei was pushing to complete its HoB Strategic and Implementation plans to establish its credentials and position itself better to lobby for the HoB Secretariat to be located in Brunei. Dato Hamdillah confided to

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Ambassador that he hopes to secure a grant of BDOLS 203,000 (approx USD 132,000) from Brunei Shell Petroleum to support the preparation and initial execution of Brunei's HOB implementation plan.

¶5. (SBU) Saidin said the GoB has four strategic objectives it will work under the HoB initiative. The first is to encourage all parties to adopt selective logging practices and stop clear cutting/burning land clearing practices for plantations. Saidin commented that Indonesia would have fewer flash floods if it practiced inter-planting as it developed palm-oil plantations to leave more natural vegetation in place to hold back soil and absorb rainfall. Second, the GoB wanted to see better budget support for replanting and conservation efforts. He noted that his department was able to secure better budget support in the last year in part from the high profile the HoB initiative has gained in Brunei. Third, Brunei wanted to develop joint promotional materials for the HoB protected areas to encourage eco-tourism. Dato Hamdillah had previously told us that while Brunei had developed the "Green Heart of Borneo" as an ecotourism brand before the HoB initiative was started, he welcomed the help HoB had given Brunei in marketing itself for ecotourism. Finally, Brunei would like to see all three HoB partners conduct joint research expeditions into the HoB area to gain better baseline data on the state of the region and to set the stage for more joint activities.

Comment: USG Support Welcome

¶6. (SBU) GoB officials have told us on numerous occasions that they welcome USG support for the HoB initiative. Dato Hamdillah told us that given how stretched his small Forestry Department is, the seed money we had given WWF was critical in getting substantive work started on Brunei's strategic plan. Hamdillah welcomed a proposed HoB International Visitor program to bring key implementation level officials from Brunei, Indonesia, and Malaysia to the U.S. to study cross-border national park and natural resource management practices. Post has worked closely with our colleagues in AmEmbassies Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta to develop a program for this

IV and identify the people who need to overcome national biases and learn to work together to make the HoB initiative a success. Sustained USG support of HoB will keep this initiative moving forward and help burnish our environmental credentials among the three Muslim-majority nations covered by the HoB.

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